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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MANAMA 001325

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STATE PASS USTR FOR LEWIS KARESH, JASON BUNTIN, AND AARON
ROSENBERG
DEPARTMENT OF LABOR FOR PETER ACCOLLA AND SUDHA HALEY

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/10/2015

TAGS: [ELAB](#) [PREL](#) [ETRD](#) [BA](#)

SUBJECT: MINISTER OF LABOR SUPPORTS MORE LABOR REFORMS

Classified By: Ambassador William T. Monroe for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)
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Summary

11. (C) Minister of Labor Dr. Majeed bin Mohsin Al Alawi expressed a strong commitment to tripartite cooperation and further labor reforms in Bahrain in a September 9 meeting with the Ambassador, Assistant U.S. Trade Representative for Labor Lewis Karesh, and U.S. Department of Labor officials Peter Accolla and Sudha Haley. The Minister welcomed USG technical assistance to support labor reforms and workers' rights and said government, business, and labor are committed to capacity building and improving their effectiveness on labor issues. End Summary.

Workers' Rights High Priority

12. (C) Minister of Labor Dr. Majeed bin Mohsin Al Alawi met September 9 with the Ambassador, Assistant U.S. Trade Representative for Labor Lewis Karesh, U.S. Department of Labor Acting Director for the Office of Trade Agreement Implementation Peter Accolla, and U.S. Department of Labor Bureau of International Labor Affairs Senior Regional Advisor Sudha Haley. Karesh explained to the minister that when Congress debates the U.S.-Bahrain Free Trade Agreement (FTA) this fall, labor issues in Bahrain will be studied carefully in Washington. The Minister replied that the FTA was a great opportunity for both countries, and he hoped it would be ratified by the U.S. soon. Al Alawi stressed that promoting worker rights is a high priority of the GOB.

Focus on Tripartite Negotiations

13. (C) The Minister emphasized that the GOB is committed to consulting both labor and employers on any initiative that will affect them. The recently-issued Ministerial Decree Number 9 (2005), which relieves union leaders of their regular work duties to give them ample time for union activities, was the result of a tripartite negotiation. The new rules in Decree Number 9 were unprecedented in the region. Al Alawi also mentioned that in drafting the new labor law that will be debated in parliament this fall, GOB officials met twice a week for two years with representatives of the General Federation of Bahrain Trade Unions (the Federation) and the Bahrain Chamber of Commerce and Industry (BCCI). Karesh commented that in a meeting the day before, Federation members had complained that the GOB altered the tripartite text of the draft law. The Minister explained that the final draft included minor changes that eliminated duplication and conflicts with other Bahraini laws. Federation and ministry representatives would meet September 24 to discuss the issue.

Plans for Further Reform

14. (C) Karesh noted that the Federation was also concerned that, under Bahraini law, public sector unions are not permitted. The Minister acknowledged that the law is vague on the legality of public sector unions. The Cabinet recently submitted to parliament legislative amendments that will clarify the law and give public sector workers full union rights. He expected parliament to debate the amendments this fall. Al Alawi recognized that Bahraini law is not fully compliant with ILO core labor standards because it forbids more than one union in a single enterprise. He had submitted a memorandum to the Cabinet recommending that multiple unions be allowed, but stressed that the matter needs further discussion as both the Federation and the BCCI prefer the current rules on this issue.

Minister Welcomes Technical Cooperation from USG

15. (C) The U.S. Department of Labor representatives told the Minister that the USG is ready to offer technical assistance to Bahrain to continue its labor reforms. Al Alawi welcomed such support and hoped it would lead to strong, professional unions and enhanced tripartite cooperation. The ministry had conducted a number of courses in the last few months to educate employers on union rights. Al Alawi mentioned the important role that parliament plays in reforms, and commented that the Federation is slowly beginning to realize that it must engage parliamentarians to advance labor rights.

MONROE